

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 2, 2020

Vicki Christiansen, Chief
United States Forest Service
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building
201 14 Street SW
Washington, DC 20227

Peter Daugherty, State Forester
Oregon Department of Forestry
1600 State Street, Building C
Salem, OR 97310

Dear Chief Christiansen and State Forester Daugherty:

We write to ask for an analysis of the role of power lines in the cause and/or spread of the Beachie Creek fire. In a recent visit to the North Santiam Canyon, in which a number of Oregonians have lost their homes, vehicles, documents, and family mementos to the Beachie Creek fire, we were questioned repeatedly about the cause of the fire and how it could have been prevented.

We now know the Beachie Creek fire, which burned through the Santiam River canyon, beginning in August, was likely caused by a lighting strike during late-summer storms. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) engaged in a full-suppression strategy, which included multiple helicopters, ground crews, rapellers, law enforcement officers, and road graders.

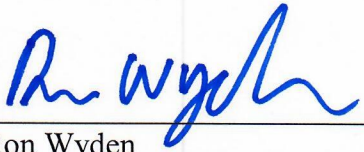
The severe drought in Western Oregon and the historic windstorms set the stage for the expansion of this fire. In addition, the Labor Day windstorm caused multiple downed power lines which also may have had a significant role in the expansion of the Beachie Creek Fire.

We would like you to analyze what role the downed power lines played in the Beachie Creek fire, and, if so, could more have been done to prevent these power lines from starting fires in the windstorm? What role did downed power lines play in establishing new fires in the Canyon?

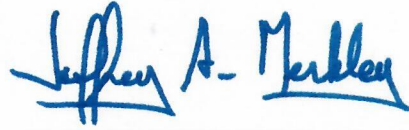
We are grateful to the first responders and the firefighters, and the support coming to these communities. We understand that hundreds of our emergency managers and state and federal workers put their own lives on hold to respond to this disaster. These actions are a part of the "Oregon Way" where people work together in uncommon efforts to deal with overwhelming and complex problems.

We are proud to serve Oregon and stand ready to support efforts to both document causes and also work on funding and policies for future prevention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Wyden", written in a cursive style.

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey A. Merkley", written in a cursive style.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator